

# The Application of Bartenieff Fundamentals <sup>to</sup> Martha Eddy to the practice of Massage

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## Philosophical Background

In our massage practice, we have experienced massage as a complex and subtly sensitive activity, requiring finely tuned perceptual, movement and communicative sensibilities. This is based on our experience of and training in movement principles, body organization, and healing. Traditional forms of massage emphasize acquisition of a wide and varied repertoire of strokes, inclusive of active and passive movement, for the stimulation of healthy functioning of the various systems of the body. However, they don't stress the development of the above mentioned sensibilities in explaining the task of giving massage and, therefore, do not have a language for communication or a methodology for skill acquisition in these regards. The Bartenieff Fundamentals has provided us with a language for explaining a number of aspects of this activity. This is so in the application of strokes, movements, and in combinations of the two. The Fundamentals have also given us working tools for the organization of massage, since we view it as a movement process.

We'd like to first present briefly the philosophical background out of which our own perspective on massage has evolved. We'll then go on to a review of the principles of Fundamentals and their relevance to our understanding of massage practice. We will then discuss concretely how the Fundamentals affect the practice of massage in terms of the practitioner's support and movement behavior in giving massage, the dynamic qualities of the massage activity itself, and the recipient's responsiveness both during and after the massage experience.

We view the person as dynamic, interactive, self-regulated, and continually engaged in movement. S/he is able to process information and make choices intelligently, even in the most passive of behaviors, e.g., receiving massage. Traditional forms of massage, however, tend to view and therefore treat the recipient of massage as static and passive and therefore act upon the recipient rather than interact with her/him. The person's intrinsic, intelligent responsiveness to stimulation and inherent gravitation towards efficient patterning is thus overlooked. The process of massage is understood as one in which change is made to happen, rather than one in which change evolves in a process of communication and presentation of options.

We understand the body in its physical organization of systems and parts to be a whole greater than its parts. Further, the body is a manifestation of the person, who is present in and responding through every one of its parts. Thus, massaging a

particular region entails a sensitivity to the personal sensory and emotional experience of this body part for the recipient and to the reverberating responses which may occur throughout or in any part of the whole.

From this philosophical context, we see both practitioner and recipient as capable of ongoing movement and change, in internal space and external orientation. These capabilities are immediately present and can be utilized as resources, listened to as guides. This leads to a number of working assumptions:

1. First, giving and receiving massage is primarily a non-verbal communication process occurring through movement, an ongoing dialogue whereby boundaries are permeated and changed.
2. Second, the structure of the massage process may be frequently or continually reorganized so that the massage emerges according to the specific and present needs of the recipient.
3. Third, the practitioner prepares for the ensuing activity by evaluating and attuning her/his present state of mind-body organization and relationship to inner/outer space.
4. Fourth, the practitioner views the total bodily organization of the client as embodying present and potential movement capabilities, and holding past patterns.
5. Fifth, the practitioner perceptually attends to and strives to work with the total body and the whole person in each moment of the interaction.
6. Sixth, the recipient responds to and moves with the healing process. Thus, the massage can literally change a person's orientation to and placement in the surround.
7. Finally, given the inner potential of the recipient, the practitioner views massage activity as inviting and facilitating change, rather than creating it.

#### Basic Principles of Bartenieff Fundamentals of Body Movement

According to Irmgard Bartenieff, the exploration of Fundamentals provides an opportunity "for the experience of the body in motion with an awareness of how and why it is moving." Fundamentals supplies the practitioner of massage (and in turn the recipient) with the observational, theoretical, and experiential guidelines necessary for establishing continuity in the flow of body movement. These guidelines arise out of the following constructs:

1. Each person has inner moods or attitudes that are reflected in his/her physical relationship with the environment which can be observed in the spatial and qualitative patterning of his/her movement or posture. Or, for every outer expression there is an inner counterpart.
2. The functional and the expressive aspects of a physical pattern are two windows for viewing the unified inner experience out of which that pattern arises.
3. Movement involves the integration and coordination of a multiplicity of factors.
4. If allowed to, recuperation naturally follows exertion as a change in the characteristics and/or intensity of the exertion.

5. In movement there is a constant interaction between mobility and stability.

These underlying Laban-based principles reflect a belief that we share, that human beings are continually moving and changing in their bodies, thoughts, feelings, and spirits in order to cope with the environment. Given this, goals for physical change are best approached holistically, as part of an ongoing life exploration.

The quality and intent of a massage is further informed by an understanding of the specific concepts and terminology of Bartenieff Fundamentals:

Inner Support: In working with the body it is common to find that internal sources of support have not been tapped. Fundamentals emphasizes the experiencing of three-dimensional breathing, vocalization, deep muscle activation, and attention to one's emotional responses in order to heighten familiarity with already inherent existing personal resources.

Connectedness: Fundamentals teaches that musculo-skeletal alignment is a constantly changing phenomenon that can be aided by the activation of deep muscular kinetic chains. When these internal muscle chains are engaged, a person can perceive him/herself to be in a state of "connectedness." It is also possible to observe this "connectedness" in others.

Body Part Relationships: To further develop awareness of how movement is taking place, the relationship between body parts is sensed or observed. This is done, for instance, by noticing the range and direction of motion in each of the joints that are active in a given movement. Attention can also be paid to the degree of muscular activity in interacting body areas. Particular habits of movement or holding in turn affect the way in which activity can pass through or sequence in the body. This understanding of body part relationships is facilitated by knowledge of the location and movement potential of those parts of the skeleton that can be felt on the surfaces of the body, referred to as "bony landmarks" (i.e., angles of the shoulder blade, trochanters, sit bones, tail etc.).

Fundamentals considers the organization of large sections of the body as well. The divisions are based on neurologically defined relationships observable in infant movement development: head/tail, upper/lower body, right/left body halves, upper right quadrant/lower left quadrant (and upper left/lower right). These patterns of organizing posture and movement bring attention to areas of physical stress that might not be obvious if simply thinking in terms of the axial-appendicular organization of the skeletal structure. For example, if right and left body halves are not in balance, there is a need for activation of the horizontal fibres of the body, such as the diaphragm and the pelvic floor. (Consider the analogy of right/left brain hemisphere communication in which there is a need for connection through the horizontal commissures of the brain.)

Center of Weight and Its Relationship to the Body

Periphery: Fundamentals pays specific attention to the center of weight, observing how the pelvis is held or moving in relation to the spine, head, ribs, legs and arms. Any movement is considered

postural or a whole statement if it involves a muscular activation in the center of the body. Hence, the use of the center of weight is encouraged in weight shifts and locomotion as well as, at times, in movements that seemingly only occur at the periphery of the body but actually require deep central support.

Three Dimensional Use of Space: Given that the body and world are three dimensional, in Fundamentals movement and posture is explored in all possible directions. It is then learned how to move the body in directions that most efficiently and expressively accomplish a particular task given the limits of human anatomy. Special attention is given to diagonal and rotational movements, which are so often lost in our common routines, as well as in most exercise programs, massage techniques, and alignment systems.

Initiation and Spatial Intent: It is taught that the efficient course of an action is determined by conscious or unconscious clarification of the physical place of movement initiation (which body part moves first), spatial intent (where the movement is going in space), and preparation (how to best prepare the body, including spatially and effortfully). Attention to this concept, and to other Laban themes of exertion/recuperation, phrasing, and the interplay of mobility and stability intensify one's perception of human movement as multifaceted and dynamic.

Mobility Process: Given that movement is a process that necessitates the integration and coordination of multiple factors, a primary Fundamentals principle is to focus on constellations of movement rather than isolated body part activity. An example of this is in muscle functioning--a Fundamentals practitioner considers muscles as they act in groups, knowing that it is the coordinated mobilization of several muscles that contributes to an ability to move with strength or grace. This differs from traditional views which consider, for example, that strength can only be determined by measuring the recruitment and contractility of the fibres of a single predominantly active muscle pair, without weighing the effects of coordination skills.

Though it may be difficult to perceive, there is always movement occurring in living beings. Stillness is not absolute, it is a relative concept. Given this, a trained observer is able to note the positioning and muscular tension of a person who is lying down, relatively still, and relate this information to a person's potential for efficiency in upright movement. Fundamentals teaches one to observe the subtle differences in how people flex, extend, rotate, abduct and adduct in the prone and supine positions (positions in which the complications of gravity are diminished greatly). Careful observations of the manner of executing these simple movements, the antecedents to upright movement, are then correlated with upright postural habits. Thus the practitioner comes to know the relationship between "still" postures and movement potential.

Overall, the use of Fundamentals as a hands-on tool is an educational approach to physical change that occurs as an

interplay between cortical and non-cortical stimulation. The language and theoretical framework of Fundamentals provide a way for the practitioner and the recipient to communicate about their experiences, enhancing the conscious comprehension of body level changes which often occur "unconsciously." Clients are thereby better equipped to solve body problems on their own.

In summary, in order to develop more comfortable ways of moving, Fundamentals teaches tools which can be consciously or unconsciously employed for "centering," for "finding a continual balance and connection with one's source of strength" and for "gaining internal support in the body as it develops to uprightness."

### The Application of Fundamentals to the Practice of Massage

What does Fundamentals offer to the practice of massage and how does it do so?

Fundamentals offers tools for analysing and improving upon the movement experience of both the practitioner and recipient of massage. The tools include: 1) an understanding of functional anatomy and kinesiology and therefore of (a person's potential) movement capabilities, 2) a method for understanding postural holding patterns, 3) insight into the nature and significance of different movement habits and a language for deriving further insights about them, and, 4) exercises to relieve muscle tension, enhance alignment and develop more efficient movement patterns, commonly referred to as the "Basic Six exercises."

### The Use of Fundamentals by the Practitioner

There are innumerable ways in which the Fundamentals theory and exercise influence the movement choices of a massage practitioner. The following are many examples of the types of questions we might ask ourselves in preparing for or engaging in a stroke.

Me as a whole person:

How am I feeling today?

What are my movement preferences today, or in general?

How am I relating to my environment spatially?

How does my inner attitude affect my contact with the particularness of my client?

Function/Expression:

How am I holding myself today? Am I experiencing pain, tension, fatigue, anxiety or boredom? Knowing that my patterns are in some way functional for me, what do I need to express physically and/or emotionally in order to experience an alternative to this particular pattern? What other inner attitudes can I get in touch with in order to function more optimally?

Inner/Outer:

Am I in touch with my inner supports? How am I breathing?  
connecting with my center of gravity? using space?

engaging deep musculature?  
What inside me needs to be manifested outwardly?

#### Exertion/Recuperation:

Am I following a stroke through to its completion, allowing a natural recuperation, and perhaps preparation for the next stroke, to emerge? Massage is often confined by a small range of motion and a high level of sensitivity. Am I using my full range of motion whenever it's appropriate?

#### Mobility/Stability:

What parts of my body keep me stable as I move to perform an action? What needs to be mobile? How can I keep my arms available for long periods of mobilization during a series of fine motor stroking? Can I occasionally stabilize myself with my arms and hands by letting my weight pass through them into the client's body, deepening his/her contact with the table?

What parts of my body do I chronically stabilize or mobilize? Do I need to warm myself up or practice some other ways of executing strokes to get myself mobilized in certain held body areas?

#### Body Part Relationships:

How am I organizing my movement? For instance, is it predominantly in homolateral body halves? Or do I have a lack of unity between my upper and lower body? Can I use diagonal movements more--particularly through my lower body when applying strong force?

#### Central/Peripheral Organization:

Am I in touch with the edges of my body and my movement capabilities through them? Most importantly--am I in touch with my hands, my direct contact with the recipient, and am I in touch with my feet, my direct source of grounding? Does this contact from the periphery flow through to the center of my body or am I making isolated gestures?

#### Weight Shifts:

Am I allowing myself to shift my weight as I execute a stroke? Am I clearly shifting my pelvis? What direction of weight transference is most useful to this stroke?

#### Sequencing and Phrasing:

Is there flow through my body in all of my strokes? Am I reinitiating a lot or ending the movement abruptly? Do I experience hesitancy, or tension, in a particular place in my body?

Is it possible for me to use more gradation in the rotary aspects of my movement? Can I keep the location of the movement constantly changing? When moving my hands, do I feel a responsiveness in my scapula and spine, particularly as I pronate and supinate my arms, and use my different fingers to apply pressure?

Can I be clearer about my initiation and spatial intent?

What is my phrasing like--does it support my goals for the recipient (i.e., relaxing or invigorating style)?

Connectedness:

What do I sense between my scapula and hand?  
tail and head?  
sitbone and heels?  
scapula and pelvis?

In movement or in standing, am I engaging deep muscular support? Are my psoas, pelvic floor, oblique and rotator muscles active? Do I have a feeling of organization as well as spaciousness throughout my body?

Have I done my Basic Six today?

### The Meaning of Fundamentals for the Practitioner-Recipient Interchange

During a massage, various levels of information (and awareness) about the recipient are perceived by the practitioner. These influence the choices the practitioner makes regarding the path to follow in the unfolding of the massage. In terms of the Fundamentals, these levels occur cognitively, visually, tactilely, and kinaesthetically. It should be understood that these information levels happen simultaneously. However, any one of them may be the central focus for the practitioner at any given moment, and they may come into the practitioner's attention in various orders. Furthermore, one practitioner's way of guidance may be to utilize primarily cognitive information first, then seeking confirmation or correction from direct perception. Another practitioner may rely on the tactile, kinaesthetic, or visual information first, seeking confirmation or correction of these perceptions by cognition. More often, a practitioner may approach a massage with a certain cognitive "set" of principles which orients her/him to look and to feel for certain sorts of elements. The Fundamentals are just such a set of principles. Naturally, since this situation is a dialogue, the complement of these enhanced realms of sensitivity in the practitioner are equally vital dimensions of movement responsiveness in the recipient. For now, however, we will focus on and elucidate our experience of the Fundamentals' influence on our practice of massage.

Utilizing the observational skills and cognitive knowledge acquired through Fundamentals training, the practitioner, prior to, or in the early stages of, giving a massage, visually studies the recipient's body for indications of its movement limitations and possibilities. For instance, skeletal organization is analyzed vis-a-vis various dimensional qualities, the relationship between center and periphery, between the upper and lower body, between the two sides, between and among body parts, between the front and back walls. The movement of breathing, in rhythm, location, and extent of fullness, the visibility of bony landmarks, the dominance of a particular body area, the availability of space within and between various body parts--these factors are also explored. We may ask, silently, a number of questions which help us in our exploration...

How is the person grounded, supported on the table and how do the musculoskeletal systems of support relate to the breathing process? How does the person adjust herself/himself while lying? Is the relationship of parts symmetrical or not? Which of these various parts appears to be held in place, to what extent, and in what direction? What parts appear responsive to breathing? What muscle chains appear to be involved in the holding pattern and which appear unengaged, disconnected? This process of questioning continues throughout the massage, expanding to include the tactile and kinaesthetic realms of perceptions, as well as the visual.

Based on this initial exploration, and feeling internally prepared, the practitioner moves toward contact with the recipient. Though the practitioner's primary purpose may be, for example, to work with the recipient's upper torso or head-neck connection, s/he may first adjust the placement of the legs. S/he strokes the buttocks so as to widen the pelvis and continues in a spiraling stroke down the legs. This adjustment of the lower limbs offers the recipient a sense of space, wholeness and therefore greater comfort so as to prepare for the more intense and focused work. This combined stroke-movement is distinct from a more time consuming and sensitive massaging of the involved tissue structures which requires highly skilled tactile sensitivity and fine focusing. The use of the Fundamentals in this instance establishes flow and continuity in a quick and direct way. In certain instances, it may also address more directly the assumed need for deeper tissue work by providing experience of movement capability and stimulating appropriate movement response which, to varying, extents, releases the tissues.

Our initial and ongoing perceptions and cognitively derived information act as guides in the application of strokes, as far as their speed, rhythm, direction, narrowness or breadth of focus, and degree of pressure. For the cognitive level of processing to be appropriate, it must be directly applied in the touch and the quality of movement embodied in the strokes. For example, the practitioner familiar with the Fundamentals knows the recipient is potentially available for sensory-motor response and for adjustments in body image. Yet the practitioner, in studying a particular recipient's shoulder region, for example, must see and relate to its present condition of space, tone, and movement ability. Perhaps the area appears relatively closed spatially, using the Fundamentals as an interpretive frame of reference. The practitioner approaches contact with this in mind. S/he gives the initial touch, or pressure, or stroke to the anterior shoulder region of both sides of the body. At the same time, s/he senses for any differences between the sides, in shape, size, movement of breathing, in alignment of the ribs, scapulae and in their aligned relationships to each other and to the vertebrae and breast bone. The practitioner simultaneously adjusts the speed, amount of pressure, and the breadth of focus of the contact or stroke in immediate response to these detected variabilities. If this contact, pressure, or stroke, applied along potentially moveable dimensions of this region, meets resistance, the original observation has been confirmed and,



furthermore, refined by direct experience. The practitioner would then evaluate and adjust her/his approach to the region to fit the available movement potential. The practitioner might apply gentle pressure, along dimensions which look and feel more open, and strokes which emphasize connections of the region with the chest wall, the underside of the shoulder joint, and the skull, defining body landmarks, such as the acromion and coracoid process, sculpting through the various shapes, inviting a sensing by the recipient of her/his inner space. The practitioner might then choose to passively move the client in a fully graded arm circle or ask her/him to do so.

Once the practitioner is in contact with the person, her/his sensitized sensory systems provide continual feedback about the present state of sensory motor responsiveness in the recipient and the interaction between this and their contact. Their movement sensibility, cultivated by study of the Fundamentals, expands the subtlety and range with which they execute strokes and movement patterns. The practitioner sculpts, carves out the bodily space in its unique configurations. S/he feels for the connections between the bodily parts, at rest and while moving, for the precise range of motion of the joints, for the relationships between and among bony landmarks, for the relationships between deep and superficial muscle groups. Strokes arise out of the dynamic interplay of movement within the practitioner, as s/he embodies it, and between the practitioner and recipient. Strokes and movements are continuously adapted in any one or more of their elements in ongoing coordination with the changing inner space of the recipient.

Altogether, the practitioner is feeling for movement possibility, where and to what degree and in what direction there is space available for movement. The practitioner's sensitivity to this movement potential is grounded in attunement to the activity and responsiveness of the recipient's breathing. Breathing sculpts inner space. In our experience of Fundamentals, it serves as the communicator between internal and external boundaries and, in this way, acts to initiate and support movement. Thus, it is a phenomenon in the recipient which can guide and coordinate the practitioner's sensing and movement choices. S/he may see and/or feel response in breathing through the upper rib cage and coordinate a stroke beginning from the sternum with that respiratory movement. This stroke may be continued through the shoulder joint, axilla, and down the arm using spirallitic strokes so as to contact deep rotary musculature and stimulate a connection between it and respiration. This stroke may be completed by lifting the arm and replacing it on the table, so as to allow it to come into a new relationship. To further awaken a sense of the dimensionality of this region, the practitioner may do a series of strokes with one hand working underneath on the back from the thoracic spine outwards while the second hand articulates the sternum, upper ribs, and clavicle. Thus the hands are being used in a spatial way, to define relationship between one part, landmark, or area and another.

Actually, this spatial use of the hands pervades the contact. The practitioner uses her/his hands dynamically so that they act as two poles for energy reception. This play

defines, constantly shapes, and articulates the whole contained within. Rather than both hands acting in the same mode towards the recipient, each will act semi-independently as tools of perception. Furthermore, their movement functions may be different as well. One hand will act to stabilize while the other hand acts to mobilize. One hand will give a message of stillness, the other of movement. One hand will provide ground, a sense of inner space, weight, and support, while the other hand will articulate boundaries--where various body parts meet and act in relation to each other, where inner and outer space interact, where various emotional, organic and movement functions intersect, pool and separate.

While these non-verbal modes of communication are occurring, the practitioner may also ask the recipient questions about her/his experience. S/he utilizes the verbal mode of communication to obtain feedback for further refinement of method and to enhance or clarify the recipient's experience.

Before, during, or after the massage, the practitioner may ask the recipient to perform certain movements for the sake of observation. S/he may use movement patterning, sometimes in combination with various strokes or pressures, to stimulate experience of the spatial dynamics of and bony landmarks involved in the movement and to assist muscular and respiratory release into the movement. For instance, while the recipient is doing a shoulder rotation in the sagittal plane, the practitioner might stroke through the space between the scapula and the clavicle and stroke around the whole perimeter of the scapula, connecting its various angles from the superior medial, close to the spine, to the inferior lateral, where the trunk joins the arm. The practitioner may execute that movement sequence on the recipient while stroking, as mentioned above, creating a choreographed pattern of strokes and movements. Or the practitioner may do some variation of these while the recipient remains in a body configuration or stretch devised from the Basic Six exercises.

Finally, the practitioner can suggest, through verbal means, ways in which the recipient can apply the Fundamentals they are experiencing during ordinary daily activities as well as during exercise.

### Conclusion

As we've now described various levels and stages of this meshing of Bartenieff Fundamentals with massage practice, we'd like to point to its benefits. Clearly, it results in an enriched experience for both practitioner and recipient, specifically through an enhancement of their communication, both in the hands-on, non-verbal contact and in their verbal interchange. For the recipient, the massage becomes more than a time to avoid the tensions and constraints of everyday life. Instead, the massage is an opportunity for expansion and growth.

We believe the Fundamentals is true to the nature of healthy organic functioning. Thus, the embracing of these principles and methods in massage can reveal a multiplicity of characteristics of natural functioning to each recipient. The experiences of letting go and of recuperation, so vital to massage, have new

meaning. Discovering the inherent structures, locations, and processes of movement provides a context for letting go of muscular tension. We can let go because there is no need to hold on--connectedness is a given attribute. It does not need strained effort. It, in and of itself, provides stability and the potential to adapt to and move through our world appropriately. Furthermore, letting go is not giving in to nothing. It is rather emerging into a space which is more open, potentially vastly more open, with inherent shape, order, and flow of movement. It is a space which contains and gives birth continually to each person's evolving process. Such a massage experience not only recuperates the recipient in the more traditional sense but expands her/his boundaries, breaks fresh ground, so to speak. One begins to find that that space is one's home, available for play and cultivation.

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